

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION /PLAN CONFORMANCE DOCUMENTATION

DOI-BLM-AK-F020-2014-0015-CX

A. Background

Proposed Action: Issue a site Right-of-Way Grant to National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON) for the use of 3.0± acres of BLM-managed land to construct, operate, maintain, and terminate a relocatable tower facility and associated infrastructure on BLM-managed land in the vicinity of Fort Greely.

Date of Proposed Action: October 20, 2014 through December 31, 2024.

Location: The proposed action is proposed to be located near milepost 254 and east of the Richardson Highway near Fort Greely. Within section 15 of Township 12 South, Range 10 East, Fairbanks Meridian.

Applicant: NEON Inc. 1685 38th St. Suite 100, Boulder, CO 80301

Serial Number: FF096806

Description of the Proposed Action

Initial construction of this project is scheduled for the first quarter of 2015, staging and some site preparation work may occur during the fourth quarter of 2014. The site has a planned operational life of seven to ten years with decommissioning of the facility and reclamation of the public land proposed as the project's final phase.

The facility is proposed to consist of:

- **Tower:** The NEON tower is a square lattice tower with an internal stairs and platform system for access. Various boom arms will house electrical instrumentation on levels of the tower.
 - Color – The tower is made of galvanized steel and will be powdercoated to blend in with the surroundings.
 - Height – The tower will be 62 feet tall.
 - Dimensions – The tower foundation footprint is 6 feet by 6 feet.
- **Instrument Hut (IH):** The IH will house electronic instrumentation and other equipment associated with the tower, as well as gas bottles, tools, safety equipment, and other tools for use during operations.
 - Delivery – The IH will be brought to the site by manpower or small vehicles such as snowmachines.
 - Construction Materials – The IH is foam insulated, steel face panel modular structure that can be delivered in pieces and bolted together providing a tight assembly capable of withstanding the temperature, humidity, rain/snow and wind conditions.
 - Color - The outer façade of the IH may vary, depending on the aesthetics and context of the site. NEON will powdercoat the IH to BLM color preferences.

- Foundation – Preliminary Alaska designs for NEON sites have indicated the use of piles (8 total) for the instrument hut foundation.
 - Foundation footprint - 10 feet by 20 feet.
 - IH Dimensions – Actual hut size 8 feet wide by 20 feet long, 9 feet tall.
- Soil Array: The soil array is an underground monitoring consisting of the following:
 - Location – See Map.
 - Configuration - Includes bore holes in five clusters arrayed out from the Tower. In the typical design, each cluster is spaced 25 meters from its closest cluster.
 - Bore Hole Size - Each hole is nominally 2 ½ inches in diameter and is either vertical or at a 45 degree angle, depending on the particular measurement for that hole. Depth is site specific, but is no more than 7 feet.
 - Construction - The soil array holes may be made using a portable Geoprobe machine.
 - Soil Pit: A soil horizon pit will be dug. The soil pit will have samples of soil removed and then re-filled with the previously excavated dirt. The soil pit will not be open for more than 3-5 days (NEON construction supervisors will be on site), and will coincide with construction activities.
 - Configuration - The soil horizon is 6 feet by 6 feet. The pit is dug to approximately 6 feet deep or to refusal.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Fortymile Management Framework Plan of 1980.

Date Approved/Amended: September 8, 1980.

The proposed action is in conformance with Objective 1 of the Land Use Plan. Objective 1 of the Plan is to “Make lands available for intensive use and public purposes.”

C. Compliance with NEPA

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 43 CFR 46.210 (e) which states that:

"nondestructive data collection, inventory (including field, aerial, and satellite surveying and mapping), study, research, and monitoring activities"

are categorically excluded under paragraph 46.205(b) unless any of the extraordinary circumstances in section 46.215 apply.

The proposed action must be screened against the extraordinary circumstances found in 43 CFR 46.215 and listed below. Any “yes” finding requires that an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement be prepared for the Proposed Action.

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES	YES/NO
1) May have significant impacts on public health or safety.	No
2) May have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.	No
3) May have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.	No
4) May have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.	No
5) Might establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.	No
6) May have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.	No
7) May have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.	No
8) May have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.	No
9) Might violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.	No
10) May have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).	No
11) Might limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).	No
12) Could contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).	No

Recommendation

I have found that the Proposed Action is consistent with the purpose and objectives of the Bureau of Land Management and with Objective 1 of the Fortymile Management Framework Plan. It will not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The Proposed Action does not trigger any of the Extraordinary Circumstances found in 516 DM Chapter 2, Appendix 2. I recommend that the Proposed Action be allowed and have concluded that neither an Environmental Assessment nor Environmental Impact Statement is needed.

/s/ Tom Beaucage

11/18/2014

Tom Beaucage
Realty Specialist
Eastern Interior Field Office

Date

Concurrence

I considered the fact that the proposed action is simply to issue a different type of authorization over a longer period of time for an existing use and for facilities which have been in place for several years. Previous authorization was by Land Use Permit under regulations found in 43 CFR 2920. No new use and no new construction or modification of facilities has been requested.

I concur that the above action is consistent with the policies, purpose and objectives of BLM, does not meet any of the extraordinary circumstances described above, and qualifies as a Categorical Exclusion.

/s/ Lenore Heppler

11/18/2014

Lenore Heppler
Field Manager
Eastern Interior Field Office

Date

Contact Person

For additional information concerning this CX review, contact Tom Beaucage, Realty Specialist, Eastern Interior Field Office, at 907-474-2350.